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HOW THE WEST STOLE DEMOCRACY FROM THE ARABS

THE SYRIAN CONGRESS of 1920 and the DESTRUCTION of ITS HISTORIC LIBERAL-ISLAMIC ALLIANCE

ELIZABETH F. THOMPSON

Praise for *How the West Stole Democracy from the Arabs*
****A Literary Hub* "Most Anticipated Book of 2020"****

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—Juan Cole, Richard P. Mitchell Collegiate Professor of History, University of Michigan

"Through brilliant scholarship and engaging prose, Thompson pieces together the Arab constitutional order that European imperialism shattered in the aftermath of World War I."

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"In a book sure to interest students of Middle Eastern history, particularly in the 20th century, Thompson fashions an original, authoritative study, laying out the process of the "theft" of Syrian democracy . . . Bitter lessons from the past unearthed and expertly reexamined."

—*Kirkus Reviews*

"That the interests of great powers override the voices of small nations is an unremarkable observation in diplomatic history, yet reading Thompson's account of the circumstances in one particular context, and knowing the consequences that followed, is enough to make you feel outraged once again." —*Washington Independent Review of Books*

HOW THE WEST STOLE DEMOCRACY FROM THE ARABS

The Syrian Congress of 1920 and the Destruction of its Historic Liberal-Islamic Alliance

ELIZABETH F. THOMPSON

Grove Press
New York

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For all Syrians

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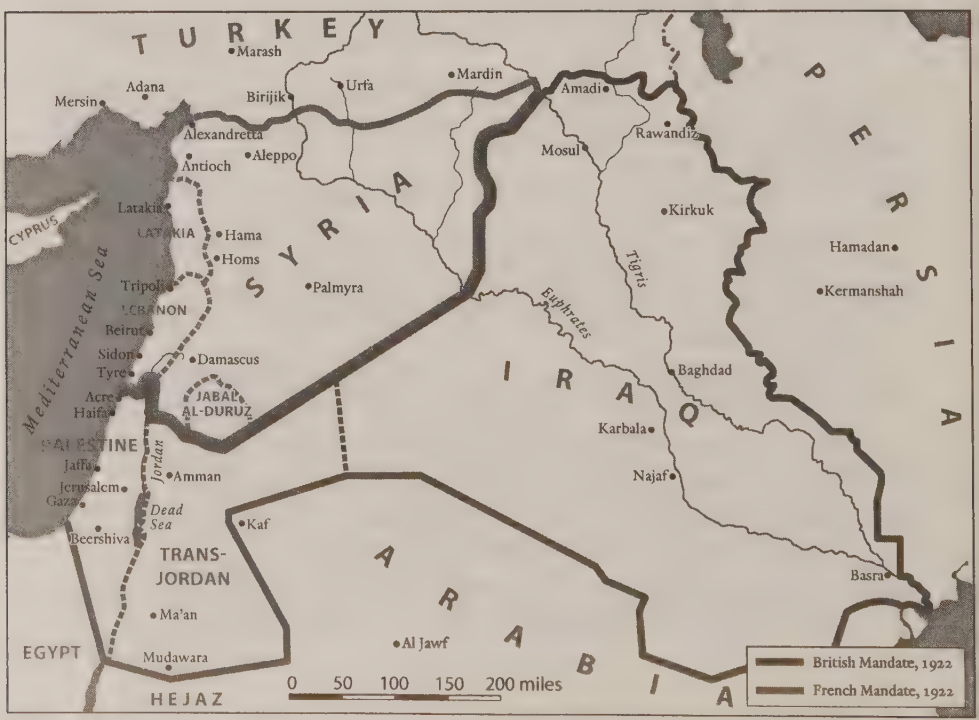
Territorial Claims in 1919. Prince Faisal claimed the territory of "Bilad al-Sham," also known as "Greater" or "Natural" Syria, in his presentation to the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference. Meanwhile, the Entente armies had occupied the entire territory and divided it into zones of Occupied Enemy Territory.



Territorial Claims in 1922. The regions of Greater Syria were officially partitioned and apportioned to Britain and France by the League of Nations Council in July 1922.

Preface

On March 8, 1920, the Syrian Congress issued its Declaration of Independence in the name of the largely Arabic-speaking peoples living in Greater Syria, comprising today's states of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Israel. During World War I, the Syrian Arabs joined the Allies in fighting against the Ottoman military dictatorship. At war's end, they embraced "Dr. [Woodrow] Wilson's lofty principles of freedom for great and small nations alike, their independence based on equal rights, and the renunciation of the politics of conquest and colonialism."[1] The Congress had already begun drafting a constitution for a democratic, parliamentary monarchy. Syria could then take its place in "civilized international society" alongside Poland, Czechoslovakia, and other nation-states carved from the Russian, Austrian, and Ottoman empires defeated in World War I.

Scholars and politicians remember Wilson's famous Fourteen Points that declared the goals of the Great War, but most have forgotten Syria's pivotal role in the effort to fulfill the American president's vision of a new world order. Aside from disputes over how to punish Germany, plans for Syria provoked the bitterest fights among the statesmen who gathered at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

Wilson had arrived in Paris as a messianic prophet of peace after four years of carnage. He promised to sweep away the international system that had thrown the world into war in 1914. In place of imperial rivalry and diplomatic intrigue, a League of Nations would manage

relations of states under a new regime of international law. "The day of conquest and aggrandizement is gone by; so is also the day of secret covenants," Wilson had declared. "[We demand] that the world be made fit and safe to live in; and particularly be made safe for every peace-loving nation which, like our own, wishes to live its own life, determine its own institutions, be assured of justice and fair dealing by other peoples of the world."[2]

Middle Eastern, Asian, and African peoples embraced Wilson's vision to end the colonial era and ensure rule by consent of the governed. But Wilson had to overcome stiff resistance from the leaders of the victorious Entente, who commanded the British, French, Italian, and Japanese empires. In order to get them to support the League of Nations, he had to make distasteful compromises, like agreeing to the French occupation of Germany, a British protectorate in Egypt, and Japan's occupation of the Chinese Shandong Peninsula.

But in the case of Syria, Wilson stood his ground, insisting on Syrians' right to self-determination. In the summer of 1919, he had sent the famous King-Crane Commission to poll Syrians on their political aspirations. Syrians submitted hundreds of petitions reminding the Entente leaders that they had fought as allies alongside them, and helped to defeat the Ottomans. Syrians had participated in parliamentary government under the Ottomans; they now considered themselves a nation deserving of sovereignty.

But Wilson suffered a stroke late in 1919. The United States would never join the League he had created. Just months after the Declaration of Independence, Syrians were stripped of both their sovereignty and their democracy. In direct contravention of the League covenant and Wilson's Fourteen Points, France and Britain forcibly occupied Greater Syria, partitioning it between them into the states of Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Jordan. They justified the use of force through the League of Nations itself, by declaring the occupations temporary "mandates," periods of tutelage for peoples not ready to rule themselves. In the end, the Great Powers at the Paris Peace Conference treated their Arab allies worse than their German enemies, imposing terms suffered only by peoples who had been colonized before the war. Syrians experienced firsthand what one legal scholar has called

the "sordid origin of international law as a derivative of a colonial order" that continues to reinforce, rather than uproot, the inequality of rights among nations.[3]

Syrians' bitter disillusion was shared across continents. The text of the Syrian Declaration of Independence had been published in an Arabic magazine read from Morocco to India and had been recited in the French Chamber of Deputies in Paris. Reports of the Declaration were also published in the Syrian diaspora's newspapers across the Americas, as well as in the major dailies of New York, London, and Paris.[4] The defeat of Syria sounded the death knell of postwar justice. The Paris Peace Conference's reactionary efforts to restore the pre-1914 world order infamously provoked a second world war and decades of anticolonial revolt. "The most durable of these post-imperial conflicts proved to be those that haunted the Arab lands once ruled by the Ottomans," one European historian recently remarked.[5]

Anti-European revolts roiled Syria, Palestine, and Iraq in the 1920s and 1930s. As a famous book title put it, the Allies had imposed on the Middle East *A Peace to End All Peace*.[6] At stake, however, was not simply a dispute over the control of territory. Under the League of Nations mandate system, the democratic sinews of governance broke. Arab liberals who stood up to European imperialists in 1920 were discredited by their defeat, jailed, and exiled. The French and British states were colonial in all but name. Under militarized regimes of surveillance, parliaments held little or no power. With no venue for legal opposition, political leadership passed to those who employed violence in their resistance. By the time the British and French evacuated after World War II, power in the post-Ottoman Arab world had passed to antiliberal army officers, landowners, and religious populists.

The story recounted in these pages—of how Europeans stole Arab democracy and expelled Syria from the so-called civilized world—has never before been told in English. British and American historians have tended to focus on the war years and on the British officer T. E. Lawrence, known—notably in the epic movie—as "Lawrence of Arabia." Arab historians have placed Lawrence in a more realistic perspective, as a secondary advisor to Prince Faisal, commander of the Northern Arab Army in the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman

Empire. In both versions, however, the story typically ends when the British military takes control of Greater Syria in October 1918.[7] Faisal is usually portrayed as an honest but weak leader, and the Syrian Arab Kingdom as doomed to fall because Syrians unrealistically resisted the decisions of the Paris Peace Conference.[8]

More recently, historians have begun to use Arabic-language documents to compose a more nuanced picture of this political moment in Syria.[9] But they still tell the story as one of national martyrdom, not of democracy denied.[10] Only four books, all in Arabic, have until now focused on the deliberations of the Syrian Arab Congress and the drafting of a constitution, which were in fact the primary focus of political activity in Damascus in 1918–1920. The Congress produced a 147-article constitution modeled on its Ottoman predecessor with modifications inspired by American federalism and checks and balances. Most notably, it reduced the monarch's power, disestablished Islam as the state religion, and granted equal rights to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.[11]

The historical neglect of the Syrian Congress and the 1920 constitution is not accidental. My research has revealed a deliberate effort by European politicians not only to destroy the Syrian Arab state but also to erase all evidence of its democracy. France and Britain suppressed a 1919 American poll of Syrians' political preferences, favoring self-rule under a constitutional monarchy. Instead, the French and British declared the Syrian Congress illegal and colluded to destroy the government in Damascus. Fearing that the nascent League of Nations might yet uphold Syrian independence, the French prime minister explicitly ordered his generals to destroy every trace of the Syrian Arab Kingdom's government. French troops consequently ransacked the offices of the Congress and Faisal's palace. Since then, Syrian historians have searched, to no avail, for an original copy of the constitution, which is known to have been in France's possession as late as August 1920.

French and British diplomats used the League of Nations to justify the occupation and to silence the protests of Syrian Arabs. They enlisted willing journalists to deploy propaganda about Arabs as incapable of self-rule, ignorant of modern liberal values, and hotheaded

Eastern peoples who needed discipline from the rational West. Years later, *The Times* of London still portrayed the March 8 Declaration of Independence as the act of "Extremists," not of the country's democratic founding fathers.[12]

The erasure of Syria's democratic past is mirrored in the concluding scenes of the 1962 blockbuster movie *Lawrence of Arabia*. After the Arabs conquer Damascus, the movie shows the city dissolving into anarchy. Arabs, all implausibly dressed as rural Bedouin, are unable to establish a government, owing to their tribal factionalism and sheer ignorance. The British military steps in to restore order. Lawrence, deeply disillusioned, decides to leave Damascus. A leading Arab officer, played by the famous actor Omar Sharif, bids him farewell. "I will stay here to learn politics," Sharif says apologetically. "You tried very hard to give us Damascus." Portrayed as a barely literate tribesman from the Arabian Peninsula, Sharif's character cuts a pathetic figure. *Lawrence of Arabia* ends by affirming the imperialist version of history, falsely portraying Syrians as incapable of self-rule. In reality, Damascus was home to many highly educated politicians and soldiers with long experience in the Ottoman government.

The pages that follow piece together what really happened by assembling documents and memories that were scattered far and wide on July 25, 1920, the day that the French occupying army forced political leaders to flee Damascus for exile in Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, and Europe. Fortunately, several witnesses kept diaries with them. Newspapers also survived. Copies of Arabic pamphlets, speeches, and letters were filed in foreign ministry archives in London, Paris, and Washington, DC.

Together, these puzzle pieces reconstruct the story of how Arabs established a democratic regime through the kind of debate and deliberation that students of the American Constitutional Convention of 1787 would recognize. Recovered documents also reveal that Arabs were not just disappointed that the Great Powers deprived them of sovereignty. They were also shocked to behold that the instruments of postwar peace were hijacked by colonizers who used the League of Nations to cast Arabs out of the family of civilized nations and so out of the protection of the law. In testimony to the League, British and

French officials fabricated a narrative of Arab extremism and Muslim fanaticism to justify their occupation as a necessary police action to keep the peace.

In ignorance of the facts, many scholars and policymakers have since unquestioningly rehearsed the colonial fiction that Arabs lacked the civilization and maturity requisite for sovereignty. These pages reveal that democracy did not *fail* at Damascus; it was purposely stolen. Dictatorship came on the heels of British and French colonial soldiers, who installed League "mandates"—meant to be friendly and temporary regimes of advice and aid—by means of brute force. The mandatory regimes uprooted the foundations of democracy laid in 1920 and built obstacles to its return by empowering a reactionary landed elite.

The highest goal of a historian is to set the record straight so that people might free themselves from the shackles of the past, imagined or real. I have found inspiration in the work of another historian, who discovered democrats where Europeans never thought they could exist.

In 1938, C.L.R. James exposed the truths of the Haitian Revolution in his classic history, *The Black Jacobins.* Descendants of African slaves had embraced and implemented the ideals of the French Revolution, only to have Napoleon Bonaparte trick them and reimpose slavery. "It is on colonial peoples without means of counter-publicity that imperialism practices its basest arts," James reflected. France crushed the Haitian Revolution with brutal vengeance. Not only did Bonaparte fear Haitian leader Toussaint-Louverture, James wrote; he "feared too the French Revolution which he and his kind had stifled." White Europeans simply could not accept that "among those blacks whom they rule are men so infinitely their superior in ability, energy, range of vision and tenacity of purpose."[13]

Likewise, the French in 1920 feared the world order promised by the League of Nations. The Arabs who built their free democratic regime in Damascus had never been slaves. They had been citizens of the sovereign Ottoman Empire. They considered themselves civilized and even white (a view upheld in by the American Supreme Court). But French and British leaders, like Bonaparte during the Haitian Revolution, feared that the Syrian Arabs—the "Black Jacobins" of the day—would undermine their claim to colonial rule elsewhere in

Asia and Africa. If Arabs could prove themselves capable of modern democratic government in Damascus, why not also in Baghdad, Jerusalem, Cairo, and Algiers?

In short, the history of postwar Syria reveals that the tragedy of the 1919 conference was due not to the oversight of a few exhausted and old-fashioned statesmen, but rather to their vigorous effort to expand a colonial and racialist world system.[14] In so doing, they squandered an opportunity to bring forth peacefully a new democratic age.

A second goal of historians is to offer lessons from the past to help us imagine a better future. We aim to show that unfortunate events had specific causes, and that behind many a misfortune lies human agency. Poor choices can be undone. One of the many lessons in these pages has already helped me to understand the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 in Syria and Egypt in a new way. These protests brought people of all kinds together—Muslim and Christian, secular and religious—around common demands for constitutional government. But distrust between secular liberals and popular Islamic organizations broke the coalitions. The uprisings ended in sectarian strife, state violence, and the persistence of dictatorship.

To my surprise, the 1920 Syrian Congress managed to unite liberals and Islamists in a way that the 2011 protests could not. The president of the Syrian Congress was a well-known cleric and Islamic reformer, Rashid Rida. Despite his religious background, Rida oversaw the drafting of a constitution that disestablished Islam in favor of equal rights for non-Muslims. My research reveals that Rida played a critical role as an intermediary between secular liberals and religious conservatives in the Congress. He worked in a world that defied the later political division between East and West, Islam and democracy. Back then a Muslim cleric could believe that liberal democratic values were universal, not the property of so-called Western civilization.

The very possibility that liberals and Islamists might unite to build a democracy was beyond the imagination of most Syrians and Egyptians in 2011. The prevailing wisdom on the liberal side was that Islam was essentially antidemocratic. Liberals of 2011 would have been stunned to know of Rashid Rida's actions in 1920. The prevailing view on the Islamist side was that liberals had been co-opted by foreign, Western

powers. They would have been surprised to learn that so-called secularists in 1920 had not shunned their religious beliefs in order to build democracy. The violent destruction of the Syrian Congress fatefully split liberals and Islamists into opposing political camps. The theft of Arab democracy in 1920 consequently led to the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and other antiliberal Islamic parties. It simultaneously delegitimized liberals who had placed their faith in Wilson's promises. Liberal elites were stigmatized as colonial puppets. In short, the French tanks that entered Damascus crushed the popular basis of liberal democracy.

I have written this book as a historian who had the privilege and pleasure of living in Damascus in more peaceful days. The year I spent studying at the University of Damascus changed my life and inspired me to earn a doctorate. I am painfully aware that to research and write this book I have enjoyed time and resources that are unavailable to most Syrian scholars. The questions I ask of the past are not those that Syrians would ask, but I hope this book may one day inspire them to write their own versions of the past.

I also write as a descendant of Americans who supported Syrian and Arab rights after World War I, and as a citizen who laments my government's policies that have since brought suffering, rather than peace, to the peoples of Greater Syria. This book aims to slay the demons that still misguide our media and our policy by demonstrating that the true cause of dictatorship and the antiliberal Islamist threat lies in the events of a century ago, not in the eternal traits of so-called Oriental culture. By exposing the true causes of dictatorship and antiliberal Islamism, we can hope to slay the demons that still confuse our media and policy.

A century after the Paris Peace Conference, we are at a moment of historical reckoning. Only in 2017 did a French president, for the first time, declare that colonialism was a crime against humanity. Emmanuel Macron called on this generation to face history and to rethink and "redesign a new relationship" between France and the peoples of its former colonies.[15]

Now is the moment to undo imperial myths and to recognize that the Syrian activists of 1920 were not "fanatics" or "extremists"

who harmed their country by disobeying Europe. Rather, they were democrats who upheld universal, liberal principles, much like the demonstrators who sparked the Syrian uprising in 2011 in the southern town of Deraa. As a Syrian friend so eloquently wrote at that time:

> It was no surprise that at the moment of truth, Syrians opened their hearts and minds to the winds of the Arab Spring—winds that blew down the wall that had stood between the Arabs and democracy, and had imposed false choices between stability and chaos or dictatorship and Islamic extremism. History did not leave behind that other, real Syria. Syria returns today to demand its stolen rights, to collect on its overdue bills.[16]

It is in that same small Syrian town of Deraa that our story begins.

Washington, DC
October 28, 2019

The Setting

Damascus is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. It existed long before the Aramaeans made it their capital around 1100 BCE and it later became a prize conquest for the Mesopotamians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. Early Christians knew of the city as the site where Saint Paul was converted. The Prophet Muhammad knew Damascus in the early seventh century as a major trade entrepôt, linked by caravan to the city of Mecca. After the Prophet's death, an Arab Muslim army conquered it. The Umayyad dynasts made Damascus the capital of their caliphate, which extended from Iran to Spain. The Umayyad Mosque houses the tomb of Saladin, who defeated European Crusaders and united Syria with Egypt under his rule in the twelfth century. Damascus became a principal center of Arab and Islamic learning and remained so after the Ottoman Turks conquered it in 1517. Every year, thousands of Muslims gathered at Damascus for the pilgrimage to Mecca. While Arabic remained their mother tongue, in the nineteenth century Damascenes began sending their sons for education and their deputies to parliament in the Ottoman capital of Istanbul. Loyalty to the Ottoman Empire peaked in the 1908 constitutional revolution, which Syrians hoped might ensure them freedom, equal rights, and local autonomy.

Our story opens with the Allies' victory over the Ottomans at the end of World War I. Alongside British troops, Prince Faisal's Northern Arab Army captured Syria in October 1918. Syrians had suffered great

tribulation under conditions of total war. They welcomed the Allied British and Arab armies that liberated them from Turkish military rule. But the nature of their new state had yet to be defined. Most people in Syria thought of themselves first as residents of their city and members of an extended family or clan with relatives in other cities. Second, they identified with their religious community, one of the multiple sects of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Third, many people also understood that they inhabited a distinct region called *Bilad al-Sham,* or Greater Syria in English. It encompassed the area between the Mediterranean to the west and the Syrian desert to the east, and between the Taurus Mountains in Anatolia to the north and the Red Sea in the south. A similar dialect of Arabic was spoken across the territory, which was united as well by networks of trade and family ties. Many urban politicians across Greater Syria had sympathized with a movement to gain autonomy for the region before the war.

Greater Syria is the setting for the history told here. Within that territory, the name "Syria" also came to be identified, after 1918, with the East Zone of the Allied military occupation, which encompassed most of today's state of Syria as well as Jordan. Some groups living in peripheral regions of this Greater Syria rejected political unity: Turkish-speaking peoples in the north, Maronite Christians on Mount Lebanon, and Zionist Jews in southern Syria, or Palestine. The struggle to define the boundaries of Syria coincided with the struggle for sovereignty. Had Greater Syria maintained its integrity against European partition, under the Syrian Arab Kingdom, it would have had approximately the same population size as Turkey, Iran, or Egypt.

The Players

Principal Players

Prince Faisal (1882–1933) Born in Mecca, he was a descendant of the Prophet and a leader of the Arab Revolt against Ottoman Turkish rule, 1916–1918. Educated in Istanbul, Faisal embraced the ideals of the 1908 constitutional revolution and joined the secret Arab nationalist organization, Fatat. He would turn against his father, Sharif Hussein, to advocate the independence of Syria.

Sheikh Rashid Rida (1865–1935) Born in Qalamun (Lebanon), Rida was an Islamic reformer and publisher of a well-known magazine, *The Lighthouse.* He was forced into exile in Cairo, Egypt, in 1897 and embraced the 1908 constitutional revolution as a blow against Ottoman tyranny. During World War I he came to favor Arab unity and independence.

President Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924) Born in Virginia, he took the United States into the Great War with the promise of a new democratic world order based on international law. Wilson's Fourteen Points set out war goals intended to overturn the system of secretive, imperialist diplomacy that had caused the conflict. While not primarily concerned with Syria, he listened to the advice of close friends who ran American universities in the region.

Secondary Players (*In Order of Appearance*)

Syrian Arabs

Rustum Haidar (1889–1940) Born in Baalbek (Lebanon), he studied law in Istanbul and Paris, where he cofounded the secret Arab nationalist organization Fatat. He would become Faisal's personal advisor and representative in Europe.

Izzat Darwazeh (1888–1984) Born in Nablus (Palestine), he joined Fatat during the Great War while working as an Ottoman postmaster in Beirut. He would serve as secretary to the Syrian Congress. A fierce advocate of independence, Darwazeh would also serve as a member of the constitution drafting committee.

Kamil al-Qassab (1873–1954) Born in Homs (Syria), he studied at the Islamic university of al-Azhar, in Cairo, and returned to open a popular school in Damascus. A gifted speaker, Qassab led the largest popular movement for Syrian independence, the Higher National Committee.

Dr. Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar (1880–1940) Born in Damascus, he earned his medical degree at the American-run Syrian Protestant College in Beirut, where he began protesting for Arab rights. In exile during the war, he helped to found the Syrian Union Party with Rida. He would become foreign minister under the Syrian Arab Kingdom and a leader of the 1925 Syrian Revolt against France.

American Envoy

Charles R. Crane (1858–1939) Born in Chicago to a wealthy industrial family, he was a great traveler and a citizen-diplomat with expertise on Russia, China, and the Middle East. Crane financially backed the 1916 reelection campaign of President Woodrow Wilson, who sent him as codirector of the American "King-Crane" Commission of Inquiry to Syria in 1919. Crane befriended Shahbandar and became a leading American advocate for Syrian independence in the 1920s and 1930s.

British Officers and Statesmen

T. E. Lawrence (1888–1935) Born in Tremadog (Wales), he worked on the British intelligence staff in the Arab Bureau at Cairo before joining Prince Faisal in the Arab Revolt. He advised Faisal during the Paris Peace Conference but soon became disillusioned. Withdrawing from politics, he wrote his famous account of the Arab Revolt, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom.*

General Edmund Allenby (1861–1936) Born in Nottinghamshire, England, he commanded the British Egyptian Expeditionary Forces, based in Cairo. Allenby liberated Jerusalem in December 1917 and supported Faisal in the capture of Damascus in late September 1918. Sympathetic to Syrian independence, Allenby was forced to defer to the Foreign Office in favor of France.

Prime Minister David Lloyd George (1863–1945) Born near Manchester, England, he took over the War Cabinet in 1916, at the depth of the Great War, and rallied the British to victory. An evangelical Christian, Lloyd George took great pride in conquering the Holy Land. After the war, he used his prestige to expand Britain's control over Iraq's oil fields.

George Nathaniel Curzon (Lord Curzon, 1859–1925) Born in Kedleston, England, to an aristocratic family, he served as viceroy of India before the Great War, and as foreign minister from 1919 to 1924. An imperialist of the nineteenth-century school, Curzon demonstrated little interest in or favor toward the Wilsonian vision of a new world order.

French Officers and Statesmen

Premier Georges Clemenceau (1841–1929) Born in the Vendée, France, he was known as the "Tiger" for his aggressive republicanism and vigorous command during the Great War in 1917–1918. An anti-imperialist, he attempted to strike a modest compromise on French claims to Syria. But pressure from France's colonial lobby and from Lloyd George would force him to sacrifice those ideals.

Robert de Caix (1869–1970) Born in Paris to an old aristocratic family, he became a leading journalist and pundit for the return of French provinces lost to Germany. De Caix was also a leader of the colonial lobby, which advocated the expansion of France's empire as a reward for victory in the Great War. He was the anti-Lawrence of France, an outsider to the foreign ministry who campaigned tirelessly for the occupation of Syria.

General Henri Gouraud (1867–1946) Born in Paris to a family of medical doctors, he pursued a military career in the French colonies of West Africa and Morocco. As a general in the Great War, he fought at Gallipoli and Champagne before becoming high commissioner at Beirut in 1919. He would direct the conquest of Syria and occupation of Damascus in July 1920.

Premier Alexandre Millerand (1859–1943) Born in Paris, Millerand made his early political career as a Radical Socialist who defended workers' rights. Before the Great War, his views became more conservative and he gravitated toward the colonial lobby. Millerand became prime minister and then president in 1920, after Clemenceau's fall from power.

Note on Nomenclature, Spelling, and Transliteration

In rendering foreign names and terms into English, I have endeavored to balance accessibility for the general reader with the needs of specialists. I have followed a simplified system of transliteration from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet that is used in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. In the main text, I have dropped virtually all diacritical marks; however, in the notes I retain the letter `ayn and the hamza for clarity. Generally, I have chosen place names that were used by local people in the post–World War I era: "Ottoman Empire" rather than Turkey, and "Constantinople" instead of Istanbul. When particular spellings are popular among English-speakers, I have chosen them over the phonetically correct transliteration: "Beirut," rather than Bayrut and "Damascus" rather than Dimashq. When names are known by multiple spellings, I have chosen one for consistency: I use "Prince Faisal" throughout, except in quotations from authors who have spelled his name variously as Faysal, Fayssal, Feisul, and Faissal. In notes and citations, however, I have added diacritical marks and reverted to phonetic transliteration in order to facilitate researchers' effort to locate the materials in library and archive catalogs.

Abbreviations Used for Archival Sources

Bodleian Library	Special Collections, Bodleian Libraries at Weston Library, Oxford
Library of Congress	Manuscript Division and/or Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC
LN-Geneva	League of Nations Archive, Geneva
MAE-Courneuve	French Ministry of Foreign Affairs archive at La Courneuve
MAE-Nantes	French Ministry of Foreign Affairs archive at Nantes, Beyrouth series on the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon
St. Antony	Middle East Centre Archive at St. Antony's College, Oxford
SHAT-Vincennes	French Historical Service of the Army in Vincennes
TNA-London	The National Archives of the United Kingdom in London

PART I

An Arab State in Syria

Chapter 1

Damascus: Enter the Prince

Monday, September 30, 1918. Night fell in Deraa, a small town at a major railway junction sixty miles south of Damascus. "How wonderful to be happy," wrote Rustum Haidar in his diary. Haidar was personal assistant to Prince Faisal, leader of the Northern Arab Army, which had waged armed revolt against the Ottoman Empire for more than two years. The wartime Ottoman regime's desperate measures had combined with the Allies' blockade to starve and brutalize Syrians. That was why, earlier that day, the people of Deraa had cheered the Arab army's arrival.[1]

Haidar had just come from a meeting with Faisal at the local train station. The two-story stone structure stood in lonely vigil along the tracks of the Hijaz Railway, which stretched 820 miles south to the holy city of Medina. The revolt had followed those tracks northward from its starting point, in Arabia, in June 1916.

Outside the station, darkness shrouded the grim underside of victory. Wounded soldiers of the retreating Ottoman army groaned in alleyways. The dead lay strewn across the land, incompletely buried. Abandoned horses roamed the town. Desperate peasants, starved in the last years of the Great War, had plundered the Serail, the governor's palace, and ripped off its wooden doors and window frames for fuel. The Serail's forlorn shell symbolized the end of the Ottoman Turks' four-hundred-year rule in this land.

Inside the station, the two men lit scented candles to ward off malaria-carrying mosquitoes, and took stock of their situation. Faisal spoke with the hard accent of his homeland in the Arabian Peninsula. At age thirty-five, he had the lean look of a desert warrior, with a neatly trimmed goatee. Only thirty years old, Haidar had the shorter and broader build of Mediterranean peoples. He looked at Faisal with intense, deep-set eyes and spoke with the soft lilt of his hometown near Mount Lebanon. A scholar, not a soldier, Haidar had attended a top college in Istanbul and studied political administration in Paris. He spent the war as principal of elite schools in Jerusalem and Damascus. Faisal was a sharif, a Sunni descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, and third son of Hussein, king of the Hijaz and caretaker of the holy city of Mecca. Haidar came from a prominent family of the opposing Islamic sect, Shiism. Despite the long history of conflict between Sunnis and Shiites, the two men bonded in their mission to claim an independent Arab state from the wreckage of the Ottoman Empire.

The revolt sprang from Arabs' discontent with the rule of the Young Turks, who had betrayed the hopes for local autonomy, democracy, and rule of law that had been raised in the 1908 Ottoman constitutional revolution. The Young Turks' 1912 coup had effectively suspended the constitution. They had purged the government and reorganized the military to privilege Turks over Arabs. Early in World War I, even as many Arab soldiers fought on the side of the Turks in the victorious battle at Gallipoli, the Ottoman governor of Syria had executed a dozen prominent Arab leaders and exiled many more on suspicion of treason for their earlier political dissent.

Within his family, Faisal remained the most loyal to the empire and especially to the Ottoman sultan who also reigned as the caliph, or spiritual leader, of Sunni Muslims. Faisal had grown up in Istanbul and served in the parliament at the outset of the war. He considered the Ottomans the best protection against Europeans' long-standing desire to partition and colonize the empire, as they had already done in Egypt and the Arabic-speaking countries of North Africa. Ottoman defeats early in the war, at Basra in Iraq and at the Suez Canal in Egypt, cast doubt on that protection.

Even though Arabs were fighting in the Ottoman army, the Young Turks worried that Arab politicians might waver in their loyalty. When Faisal's father learned of a Turkish plot to remove him from power, he chose Faisal, his most pro-Ottoman son, as his envoy to Istanbul. What Faisal saw on his trip in the spring of 1915 broke his faith. He arrived in Istanbul just as two hundred Armenian leaders were arrested; from his train windows he saw the first mass deportations of poor Armenians. Stopping at Damascus, he learned of similar arrests among Arab leaders. The Ottoman commander in the city, Jemal Pasha, greeted him coldly. Faisal secretly joined the Fatat nationalist organization that Rustum Haidar belonged to, and met the men who were now poised, in 1918, to build a Syrian state: General Ali Rida al-Rikabi, also known as Rida Pasha al-Rikabi and General Yasin al-Hashimi both assured him of military support; Dr. Ahmad Qadri and Dr. Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar pledged political support. In June 1915, Faisal carried the Damascus Protocol back to his father. It set the terms of a potential alliance with Entente powers against the Ottomans, primarily the promise of an independent Arab state stretching from Anatolia to the Gulf and Red Sea.[2]

On the basis of support in Damascus, Faisal's father, Sharif Hussein, opened negotiations with the British high commissioner in Egypt in the summer of 1915. The British, who were then fighting a losing battle against the Ottomans at Gallipoli, desperately sought a prominent Muslim ally to wage a counter-jihad. They feared that the millions of Muslims under their rule, in Egypt and India and beyond, might otherwise rebel. But it was a risky move to rebel against the Ottoman caliph in wartime. Hussein could do so only by justifying the revolt as a means to defend the sovereignty of the Arabs and Islam. He therefore proposed to High Commissioner Henry McMahon in Cairo that Britain promise the Arabs an independent state covering the territory of Greater Syria, Iraq, and the Arabian Peninsula. In October 1915 McMahon responded in the affirmative, with the exception of territories along the Syrian-Lebanese coast claimed by the French and in southern Iraq and along the Persian Gulf occupied by the British and their clients. Hussein rejected French claims and insisted that

the Iraqi lands be evacuated after the war. The alliance was sealed in March 1916, but the vague wording of McMahon's promises, unknown to Faisal in 1918, would haunt British-Arab negotiations at war's end.[3]

The Arabs launched the revolt after Jemal Pasha ordered a second round of hangings of prominent Arabs, conducted in the main squares of Beirut and Damascus on May 6, 1916. By then, food shortages had already begun to starve the Syrian population. Jemal Pasha deported five thousand Syrian families to exile in Anatolia and transferred all Arab troops from the region. The Arab Revolt could no longer depend on internal Syrian support. The British alliance was now critical to its success. On June 10, 1916, Hussein launched the revolt with the conquest of Mecca. Arab forces moved northward and by the following summer liberated the key Red Sea port of Aqaba. The British spy T. E. Lawrence, who met Faisal in October 1916, masterminded the sabotage of the Hijaz Railway, crippling Ottoman troop movements. Faisal proved to be Hussein's most militarily skilled son. His Northern Arab Army battled through today's Jordan in coordination with the British-led Egyptian Expeditionary Forces, which conquered Jerusalem in December 1917. On the eve of the final push toward Damascus, Faisal commanded 8,000 regular troops and 4,000 irregulars, fighting alongside 69,000 troops under the British general Allenby, facing 34,000 Ottoman troops. By then, Faisal's Northern Arab Army consisted of mainly Syrian soldiers and tribal units. Hijazi tribes who had launched the revolt two years earlier remained in the south as local Syrians deserted the retreating Ottoman army to join Faisal. Syrian-Arab troops played a critical role in disrupting the Ottoman communications hub at Deraa, disabling 25,000 enemy soldiers, and diverting Ottoman troops from British forces' advance along the coast. General Allenby sent Faisal a thankful note crediting his Arab army as a key factor in the Allies' success.[4]

Rustum Haidar had been the revolt's contact behind Ottoman lines. In August 1918, as Ottoman fortunes sank, he and other Fatat members escaped Damascus to join Faisal's army for the final push. The day before the Arab army entered Deraa, Faisal and Haidar had raised the Arab flag at nearby Busra, an ancient Roman town built on dark volcanic rock. The flag had three horizontal stripes—green, black, and white—representing the three ancient Arab caliphates. A red triangle

represented the Hashemite dynasty of Faisal and his father. Busra's support was crucial because the town controlled food supplies and roads needed for the march to Damascus.

At the same time, the approaching forces sent an open letter to the city's Ottoman commander, announcing that they had come in judgment against the Young Turk regime that had heedlessly dragged their subjects into the Great War on Germany's side in 1914. The Arab Revolt would avenge the victims of their war crimes. The letter read as follows:

> God protect humanity from you and your Genghis-like evils. You destroyed the houses of the orphans with the intention of doing good and cut down the trees to burn in your trains which carry the sons of the country to destruction and death. You declared your unjustifiable war legal and you shattered the city of the Muslims [Mecca] and borrowed millions for your own benefit and burdened the people whom you did not even consult about the war and [who] had no will for it.[5]

The Arabs' triumph now lay within reach. The next day, the army would enter Damascus.[6] But, now, at the eleventh hour, a new obstacle arose. Faisal and Haidar heard rumors that the British aimed to reach Damascus first and place it under their own military command. Britain's leaders appeared to have conflicting policies. Whereas in 1915 they had promised the Arabs an independent state simply for joining the Allies, the previous summer they had altered that promise: the Arabs would command only the territory that they themselves directly liberated from the Ottomans. It was therefore vital that the Arabs reach Damascus first, Haidar advised Faisal. Everything hinged on speed.

General Edmund Allenby, commander of Britain's Egyptian Expeditionary Force, ordered his troops (mostly Australians) to move in on Damascus from the coast. British airplanes dropped leaflets warning the Turks that their ally Bulgaria had just surrendered. General Liman von Sanders, the German-Ottoman commander in Syria, ordered a full evacuation northward to Aleppo.[7] That very night, September 30, the last Ottoman train pulled out of Damascus under a rain of

rebel bullets fired from roofs and balconies. The last to depart were German soldiers, who exploded stockpiles of ammunition.

From a ridge overlooking the city, a British intelligence officer named T. E. Lawrence watched the geysers of flame and bursting shells. "The roar and reverberation of the explosions kept us all awake," he recalled.[8] Lawrence, also just thirty years old, had fought alongside the Arabs for almost two years. How many nights he and Faisal had talked of this moment! As the sun rose, he descended toward the fabled city with Faisal's chief of staff, Nuri al-Said, a former Ottoman officer from Iraq. Peasants were already tilling their fields. "The silent gardens stood blurred green with river mist, in whose setting shimmered the city, beautiful as ever, like a pearl in the morning sun."[9]

The cool Barada River had watered Damascus and its surrounding orchards since ancient times. At the heart of the city towered the seventh-century Umayyad Mosque, built on the site of a former Roman temple and church. Next to the mosque was the tomb of Saladin, who defeated the Crusaders five hundred years later. Since then, the faithful had gathered every year outside the mosque to launch the pilgrimage to Mecca. Damascus was already a center of religious faith and learning when the Ottomans conquered it in 1516. It was now also a center of the modern Arab cultural renaissance. Losing Damascus broke the Ottomans' four-hundred-year hold on the eastern Arab world.

On the morning of October 1, the Arab army entered Damascus from its southern borders. Hundreds of soldiers marched through the Midan neighborhood of grain merchants and rural migrants toward city center, passing buildings festooned with the striped Arab flags.[10] "By the thousands, people gathered on the side of the road . . . clapping, calling, and singing and ululating and tossing flowers. Rose water showered upon us," a soldier wrote in his diary. "My tears poured down and my heart nearly stopped beating."[11] "Many were crying, a few cheered faintly, some bolder ones cried out our names: but mostly they looked and looked, joy shining in their eyes," Lawrence later wrote.[12] "Pandemonium reigned," recalled William Yale, an American intelligence agent who witnessed the scene. "We were invited into people's homes and had wine and sweetmeats pushed

upon us. It was a wild, hectic day, the like of which a man is fortunate to experience but once in a lifetime."[13]

Behind all the smiling faces, however, lurked fear and anxiety. Many Damascenes had not slept the night before, fearing that the Germans might torch the city before leaving. They also feared the wild-looking Bedouin in the Arab army, who were known to plunder. The city had been without streetlights since 1917, when the cash-strapped Ottomans had shut down its electric plant.[14]

In the previous two weeks, Damascus had descended into chaos. The police department shut down. Most of the city's ruling elite, who usually provided additional security, were absent, either dead or in exile. Only the prominent Jaza'iri family had stepped into the void. At the request of the departing governor, they deployed their private militia to patrol the streets. They then proclaimed a Syrian Arab state under the authority of Faisal and his father, Sharif Hussein of Mecca. They even raised atop the Ottoman Serail an Arab flag, which they claimed to have carried from Mecca on Faisal's orders.[15]

This was not, in fact, the official plan. Faisal had commanded the revolt's agents in Damascus to form the Arab government immediately upon the Turks' departure. Other leaders of the revolt were suspicious of the Jaza'iris because the family had long been clients of France, which had designs on Syria. These leaders believed the Jaza'iri brothers aimed to grab power for themselves.

"We couldn't tolerate this situation," recalled Dr. Ahmad Qadri, a close associate of Rustum Haidar.[16] On October 1, he and Lawrence expelled the Jaza'iris from the Serail. One of the brothers was killed. That night, in response, the family unleashed hundreds of their militiamen onto Damascus streets and made violent speeches against Faisal.[17] The Northern Arab Army crushed them in a few swift street battles that night, claiming control of the city. But the incident portended future resistance by old city notables against the government of the young rebels.

William Yale, the American agent, obtained a copy of a new Arabic newspaper published that same day to proclaim independence. "Hail to these O Arab arms that spread peace and cheerfulness in these unhappy countries, which oppression and persecution have destroyed and laid

waste," read its lead editorial. It pledged loyalty to Sharif Hussein, king of Syria and the Hijaz. "O Arabs. This is your Independence, watch over it. This is your flag, love it. This is your King, establish him."[18]

Yale, a burly thirty-one-year-old related to the founder of the university bearing his name, was not enthusiastic about Sharif Hussein, and he was suspicious of Faisal. He had come to the Middle East before the war as an employee of Standard Oil. During the war, he worked as an agent for the US State Department, and he had spent the previous two years reporting on Syrian affairs from Cairo, where he picked up an attitude of suspicion toward Muslims from British agents like T. E. Lawrence (on frequent leaves from the battlefield), from Lebanese Christians, and from Zionists. He knew only a smattering of Arabic.[19] In his reports to Washington, Yale cautioned against taking Syrian Muslims' praise for Wilson and their desire for a constitutional government at face value. He offered Orientalist warnings about Muslim tendencies toward dictatorship, chaos, and contempt for non-Muslims. Beneath Turkish tyranny, only the American Syrian Protestant College at Beirut had promoted tolerance and national unity among Muslims and Christians, Yale claimed, basing this observation only on hearsay from Cairo sources.[20] The reports Yale filed from Syria that fall were bound to influence the American peace delegation in ways that Prince Faisal and Rustum Haidar would deplore.

The next day, October 2—even as German generals officially informed their government that they had lost the war—Arab forces worked to establish order in Damascus. They restored electricity, organized police patrols against looting by Bedouin soldiers, and cleared streets of corpses and army debris. Shipments of food from Haifa and army depots soon arrived.[21] The Turks had even abandoned their wounded soldiers at the military hospital. Lawrence helped to bury those who had died.[22]

Faisal also telegraphed news of the conquest across Syria. Local nationalists immediately raised Arab flags in in the major inland cities —Homs, Hama, and Aleppo—and on the coast in Beirut, Tripoli, and Latakia. Each flag staked a claim to Arab rule against European colonial ambitions.[23]

The Arabs followed plans that had been drawn up weeks earlier by leaders of Fatat, the secret nationalist organization. Haidar and Qadri

had founded Fatat before the war, when they were students in Paris. During the war they had expanded Fatat's network with branches in most Syrian cities. Faisal had joined the organization in 1915, during a visit to Damascus. It was the alliance between Fatat and Faisal, the combination of urban political expertise with tribal military power, that had shaped the Arab Revolt.

On October 2, Qadri organized the cleaning and decorating of Damascus streets in preparation for Faisal's triumphal entry. While these preparations were under way, Faisal and Haidar bided their time, visiting villages south of the city to secure the loyalty of local leaders. They waited anxiously for news about the entry of Arab troops. Had they reached Damascus first, or had the British outrun them? Faisal worried because he had learned of a secret agreement Britain had signed with France, dividing Arab territories between the two nations. While the agreement was said to have allocated autonomous territory to the Arabs, France had never publicly acknowledged Britain's promise to Faisal's father of full independence. It was imperative that the Arab army stake its claim.

To Faisal's relief, Druze leaders living near Deraa reported news that the Arab army had indeed beaten the British to Damascus. In fact, they boasted, their own Druze troops, who had recently joined Faisal's army, were the first to enter the city.[24] Faisal chose not to dispute the point. Druze support for the revolt was fragile. The Druze were a tight-knit tribal community that followed a secretive sect within Islam. Although they spoke Arabic, they did not fully identify with Arab nationalism. Faisal therefore responded by congratulating the Druze elders whose sons had helped to conquer Damascus. "There is no difference between us," he proclaimed. "The important thing is to enter Damascus." Then Faisal sent Haidar ahead to organize a triumphant parade.

The Arab Claim to Syria

On October 3, 1918, Faisal marched into Damascus on horseback at the head of a procession organized to display the Arab Revolt's broad and local support. Nuri al-Said, a native of Baghdad, followed close behind with other elite Iraqi officers who hoped to establish an independent

Iraqi state in confederation with Syria. Next came Rustum Haidar, representing coastal Lebanon, in a carriage with two Damascenes: General Ali Rida al-Rikabi and Dr. Ahmad Qadri. Rikabi was a highly decorated, middle-aged officer; Qadri was a medical doctor, barely twenty-five years old. During the war, both al-Rikabi and Qadri had worked as Fatat agents inside Syria, behind Turkish lines. Next came tribes from Greater Syria—the Howeitat, Rowala, and Druze—followed by hundreds of ordinary soldiers, mostly from Greater Syria, marching on foot. Troops from the Arabian Peninsula, who had launched the revolt two years earlier, had by then returned home.[25]

"Their numbers were huge, more than a thousand," an Arab army officer recalled. "It was an amazing sight."[26] Faisal's straight-backed figure, adorned with a lightly patterned headdress and dark cloak, stood out amid a sea of fezzes and turbans. Photographs show a few women in the crowd that cheered the procession.[27]

Suddenly, a red Mercedes-Benz pulled up alongside Faisal on the parade route. Behind the wheel was Major Hubert Young, who had served as the Northern Arab Army's supplies officer. The flashy car had been captured from German officers. Young informed the prince that he had been summoned to the headquarters of General Edmund Allenby, commander in chief of British forces in Syria, at the Victoria Hotel in the city's center.

Faisal was startled. He explained that the parade was meant to end at the Serail, where a reception of prominent notables awaited him. No, Young said, General Allenby insisted that Faisal meet him first. The prince consented, but he refused to ride in the Mercedes. Instead, he and Nuri al-Said galloped ahead beneath the Arab flags draped from rooftops and balconies while Young followed. "I drove in splendor for some distance, embarrassed by the plaudits of the crowd, who naturally took me for the hero of the hour."[28]

They reached Marjeh Square, the political heart of Damascus, minutes later. Situated just outside the old city's walls, Marjeh was lined with hotels, cafés, theaters (including the city's first movie theater), the police station, city hall, and the governor's imperial Serail. To deter looters, a gallows had been erected in front of city hall.[29] At that same spot, on May 6, 1916, the Ottomans had hanged Arab

nationalists from the city's most respected families.[30] Faisal paused to honor the martyrs, then crossed to the nearby Victoria Hotel. Nuri al-Said and Major Young entered with him.

With Lawrence at his side, Allenby had watched Faisal's arrival, amid the joyous throng, from the balcony of his room. As soon as the prince entered, Lawrence translated a telegram from London for him: the Foreign Office officially recognized the Arabs as Allied belligerents, thereby guaranteeing them a seat at the coming peace talks.

"Faisal, smiling through the tears which the welcome of his people had forced from him, put it [the telegram] aside to thank the Commander-in-Chief for the trust which had made him and his movement," Lawrence wrote. "They were a strange contrast: Feisal, large-eyed, colourless, and worn, like a fine dagger; Allenby, gigantic and red and merry."[31]

Faisal and Allenby were meeting for the first time, after weeks of coordinating with one another on parallel battlefronts. They now had to arrange temporary administration of the occupied territory, until a final settlement after the war's end. According to Major Young, Allenby informed the prince that he would remain the general's subordinate, as a military officer with the rank of lieutenant general. Faisal would report to Allenby through his liaison in Damascus and chief political officer. He was not to dabble in civil affairs. None of this surprised Faisal.

But then came the bombshells: Faisal would also report to a French liaison, soon to be appointed. And his Arab administration would extend only to the Syrian hinterland, not to the Lebanese or Palestinian coast.[32] Faisal was an even-tempered man, rarely given to anger. "I have never seen a more patient person in my life," Fa'iz El-Ghussein wrote.[33] But the prince showed his anger now. "Faisal objected very strongly," recalled a witness to the scene. He swore that the Arabs would never accept French supervision, nor would he ever meet with a French liaison. Allenby calmed Faisal by promising that the French military governor at Beirut would not meddle in Arab politics.[34]

What Allenby did not tell Faisal was that on September 30, the British and French had formally confirmed their commitment to the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement. Drawn up secretly in Paris, the agreement

granted direct rule to France over the Syrian-Lebanese coast and in southeastern Turkey and to Britain in Iraq from Baghdad south. Palestine was to be an international zone. The agreement provided only for a semi-independent Arab state restricted to the hinterland and split between French and British zones of influence.[35] The British had made these promises to France at a low point in World War I, when the French worried that while they concentrated their troops on the Western Front, British troops on the Ottoman front stood to gain colonial territory. By promising France territorial gains, the Sykes-Picot Agreement bolstered the alliance. But it violated the promise of a large, completely independent Arab state that Britain had made in 1915 to Faisal's father. The British high commissioner in Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon, had made the promise to Sharif Hussein in exchange for Arab support in defeating the Ottomans.

Faisal's hope that Britain would honor the promises made to his father was deeply shaken. But now was not the moment to challenge Allenby. His people were waiting outside to celebrate. The prince swallowed his disappointment and rushed to the reception at the Serail. "When he arrived, cheers rose up," Haidar wrote that night. "Everyone threw himself on Faisal's hands [trying to kiss them], rejoicing. . . . People pushed through the door." Government officials, tribal and religious chiefs, and city notables greeted the prince. The mufti of Damascus pledged allegiance to Faisal and to his father, Sharif Hussein. Like the other notables gathered at the Serail, the mufti had until recently supported the Ottomans. He had also, Haidar noted, signed a wartime fatwa ordering Faisal's assassination.

Faisal understood that he had to win the support of these conservative Damascene notables, who would jealously guard their local influence against inclusion in an Arab national state ruled by younger men like himself. As he stood up to speak, he found comfort in the faces of Arab nationalists whom he had met on visits to Damascus.[36] He thanked everyone for the warm welcome, then explained that Syria's revival could be accomplished only by "uniting our hearts and tongues, and standing shoulder to shoulder." The war was not yet done, and Syria was not yet fully won, he reminded them: "We need to expel the Turks from Aleppo, to beyond the Taurus Mountains!"[37]

After the reception, Faisal attended a banquet hosted by General Allenby. He then met individually with the city's notables and religious leaders, who appeared to welcome his vision of Arab unity.[38] Although Faisal's day had begun with disappointment at Allenby's announcement that Britain intended to limit his power, it ended with hope that the Damascene elite would support his rule.

Before going to bed that night, Faisal ordered Rustum Haidar to depart immediately for Beirut to raise the Hashemite flag and establish Arab rule there. The prince had no intention of heeding Allenby's warning to leave the coast to the French. By establishing facts on the ground, the Arabs might force the British to keep their promises. Haidar packed his bags and hit the road before daybreak.

T. E. Lawrence also took his leave on the morning of October 4. He and Faisal had grown to be close friends in the previous two years. They addressed each other as "dear friend" and "brother" in their letters. Faisal might have expected Lawrence to stay on, to help build the state. Why Lawrence decided he would not remain is unclear. It may have been shock—or perhaps even guilt—over Allenby's orders to Faisal that prompted him to leave so suddenly. Lawrence had heard reports of the Sykes-Picot Agreement in the spring of 1917. But like Faisal, he had hoped the Arabs' valor would shame Allenby into granting them their due. As soon as Faisal had left the Victoria Hotel, Lawrence spoke personally to General Allenby. Expressing his disappointment that Britain would honor French claims, he requested permission to return to England immediately. Allenby reluctantly granted it.

During a stopover in Cairo, Lawrence told a fellow officer from the Arab Revolt that he had left because he was exhausted. "As we hoped we got to Damascus, and there I had to leave the Arabs—it is a pity to go, and it would have been unwise to stay. I feel like a man who has suddenly dropped a heavy load—one's back hurts when one tries to walk straight," he wrote. "We were an odd little set, and we have, I expect, changed history in the near East. I wonder how the Powers will let the Arabs get on."[39]

However, Lawrence's actions upon arrival in London suggest he was on a mission of damage control. He scheduled multiple meetings with British officials to discuss methods for blocking French rule over

the Arab state.[40] In a secret report submitted to the British cabinet, Lawrence credited Faisal and his father with loyalty and courage as war allies. He warned that the Arabs were strong enough to resist European occupation. "Faisal requires to be sovereign in his own dominions," Lawrence advised. "His assets in Syria are not small. He controls most of the good corn land and the four industrial towns. He has 80% of the Moslems (including all the fighting men) on his side, all the Ansariya [Alawis], all the Jews." He also predicted that the Arabs would contest the validity of the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement at the peace conference. Lawrence did not trust any effort by Lloyd George's cabinet to amend Sykes–Picot; the Arabs would be secure and satisfied only with the full independence promised to Faisal's father, Sharif Hussein, and promised by the American president Woodrow Wilson in his speeches on transparent diplomacy and rights to self-determination. "For this reason," Lawrence concluded, "I would suggest no second edition of the Sykes-Picot Treaty be produced."[41]

On October 5, Faisal made another move to establish facts on the ground, with a public proclamation of Syrian independence. He therefore published a leaflet reproducing his speech to the notables, and he distributed it across Syria. "I thank all Syrians for the sympathy, affection and cordial reception they accorded our victorious armies," the leaflet began. It proclaimed that the new state would be an "absolutely independent, constitutional Arab government for all of Syria in the name of Sharif Hussein." The leaflet also announced that General Ali Rida al-Rikabi would act as governor over a temporary military administration, until a formal government was organized.[42]

This proclamation violated Allenby's orders that Faisal remain a military commander only. The prince clearly spoke as the authority on matters of civilian rule.[43] He also addressed his proclamation to all Syrians, with no explicit limit to the territory he controlled in the Damascus hinterland. In the common parlance of the time, "Syria" referred to territories of six Ottoman provinces that comprise today's Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel/Palestine. More than 3.5 million people lived there in 1914, out of about 20 million total in the Ottoman Empire.[44] Faisal and other Arabs viewed this "Greater Syria" as an optimal national unit. It was naturally bounded by desert in

the east and south, the Mediterranean in the west, and the Taurus Mountains to the north. Its people all spoke the same dialect of Arabic and shared family networks across major cities, along lines of trade linking inland grain centers with ports on the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. To partition the territory, as the Europeans' secret treaties intended, would truncate the land, harm livelihoods, and split families.

In the same spirit of defiance, Faisal sent Nuri al-Said, chief of the Arab army, north to claim Aleppo from the Turks before the British could. He sent another Fatat member as governor in Beirut, where newspapers published Faisal's proclamation of an independent Syrian state. Alarmed at the news, a French envoy sent a dispatch to Paris, urging the immediate deployment of French troops to Beirut. "The Sharifians [as the French called Faisal's army] are trying to establish a *fait accompli* against us," he warned.[45]

Meanwhile, Faisal and his military governor, Rikabi, quietly appointed Fatat loyalists to top posts in Damascus: army chief of staff, police chief, civilian governor of Damascus, president of the top court of appeal, and governor of Aleppo. Contrary to British portrayals of Faisal as a naive desert warrior, he ruled in accordance with the program he and the Fatat organization had been developing since 1915. Highly educated and experienced politicians within the Fatat organization now served as his principal advisors.[46]

Faisal's opponents, especially pro-French Maronite Christians in Mount Lebanon, portrayed his regime as foreign, led by Bedouin from the distant Arabian Peninsula. (This image was replicated decades later in the movie *Lawrence of Arabia*.) Actually, Faisal ruled through an administration staffed by soldiers and bureaucrats from Greater Syria (including modern Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine/Israel). These men would play a central role in events over the next two years. They included not just Rikabi, Haidar, and Qadri, but also Kamil al-Qassab, a Muslim cleric, and Faris al-Khoury, a Christian politician, both from Damascus; Riad al-Solh, a young lawyer from Lebanon; and Izzat Darwazeh, a veteran Ottoman bureaucrat from Nablus, in Palestine.[47] Faisal's father, Sharif Hussein of Mecca, had no influence on politics within Syria.

The Arab regime's next clash with Allenby came within a week. Haidar and Faisal's appointed governor had been delighted to discover that Beirut's mayor had already raised the Arab flag. They also ensured that the flag flew in nearby Baabda, the capital of Mount Lebanon.[48] But shortly after the governor's arrival, French troops landed at Beirut and demanded that he vacate the Serail. He refused, insisting that he represented the will of the people, in keeping with President Woodrow Wilson's promise of self-determination, and maintaining that he would not vacate his post without a direct order from Faisal.[49] To resolve the conflict, France called on the British to use their superior military force and influence. On October 9, General Allenby sent a British officer to the Serail to oust the Arab governor and take down the flag.[50]

Outraged, Faisal resigned his position as lieutenant general, protesting that the flag represented the self-determination of the Arab people. "Divine justice and the nobility of mankind will not accept such an action. I demand that the stain upon that flag be obliterated and that people of Beyrouth should attain their wishes."[51]

Allenby, who was headquartered in Jerusalem, traveled personally to Damascus to reassure the prince that the French military governor was temporary, though he apparently had no authority to make such a guarantee, as revealed in a report he quickly filed in London: "I gave the Amir Faisal an official assurance that whatever measures might be taken during the period of military administration they were purely provisional and could not be allowed to prejudice the final settlement by the peace conference, at which no doubt the Arabs would have a representative," Allenby wrote. "I reminded the Amir that the Allies were in honour bound to endeavor to reach a settlement in accordance with the wishes of the peoples concerned."[52]

Arab's suspicions were raised again only days later, when Allenby produced a map dividing Syria into three military zones. It severed the Lebanese coast from Faisal's jurisdiction in the hinterland, leaving Syria landlocked. It also transferred the Bekaa Valley, traditionally part of the Ottoman province of Damascus, to the French zone. The map undercut Faisal's credibility as an independent Arab ruler, before the public and before the peace conference, where final boundaries would

be set. If the British enforced this boundary, Faisal warned Allenby, "my position will become impossible."[53]

Fearing armed revolt, Allenby capitulated. He ordered the French military governor at Beirut not to cross the Lebanese mountains into the Bekaa Valley, which would for now revert to the control of Damascus. Nor should the French raise their flag at Beirut, in a gesture to reassure Arabs that sovereignty on the coast would be decided only at Paris. Allenby further appeased Faisal by granting him full civil and military control over Arab affairs in his territory, with a population of 1.5 million. Now designated OET-East (Occupied Enemy Territory, Eastern Zone), Faisal's domain stretched from Aleppo south to Aqaba and the Red Sea and east to Deir ez-Zor. From Beirut, France would rule the OET-West, stretching along the Mediterranean coast from today's northern Israel to Turkey. And from Jerusalem, the British would rule OET-South, encompassing today's Israel and Palestine. Allenby salved concerns of both the French and the Arabs about the boundaries by assuring them that these were temporary, to be settled later at a peace conference.

The armistice was, however, still weeks away. Even as Allenby and Faisal negotiated, Nuri al-Said and the Arab army continued to march northward, in parallel with the British Desert Mounted Corps, to oust the Ottomans completely from Syria. The Arabs occupied the city of Homs on October 14, and Hama five days later. As Ottoman forces fled north into Anatolia, their Arab personnel defected in droves. Many officers and hundreds of ordinary soldiers joined the Arab army. With his ranks swelling, Nuri al-Said set out for Aleppo.[54]

Shortly before midnight on October 24, the Arab army occupied Aleppo's medieval citadel. Nuri established his headquarters at the famous Baron Hotel, a popular lodging for European travelers on the Orient Express. Two days later, the British marched into the city, welcomed by a "wild" demonstration of popular enthusiasm.[55] The Ottoman army, led by the future Turkish president Mustafa Kemal, retreated over the Taurus Mountains. Much to Britain's discomfort, the Arabs publicly claimed Aleppo, once a major trade crossroads of the Ottoman Empire, as the northernmost city in their emergent Kingdom of Syria.

Within days, the Ottoman sultan's government signed an armistice. On October 31, 1918, war on the Ottoman front came to an end.